BATMAN FOREVER: Alfred's dirty linen

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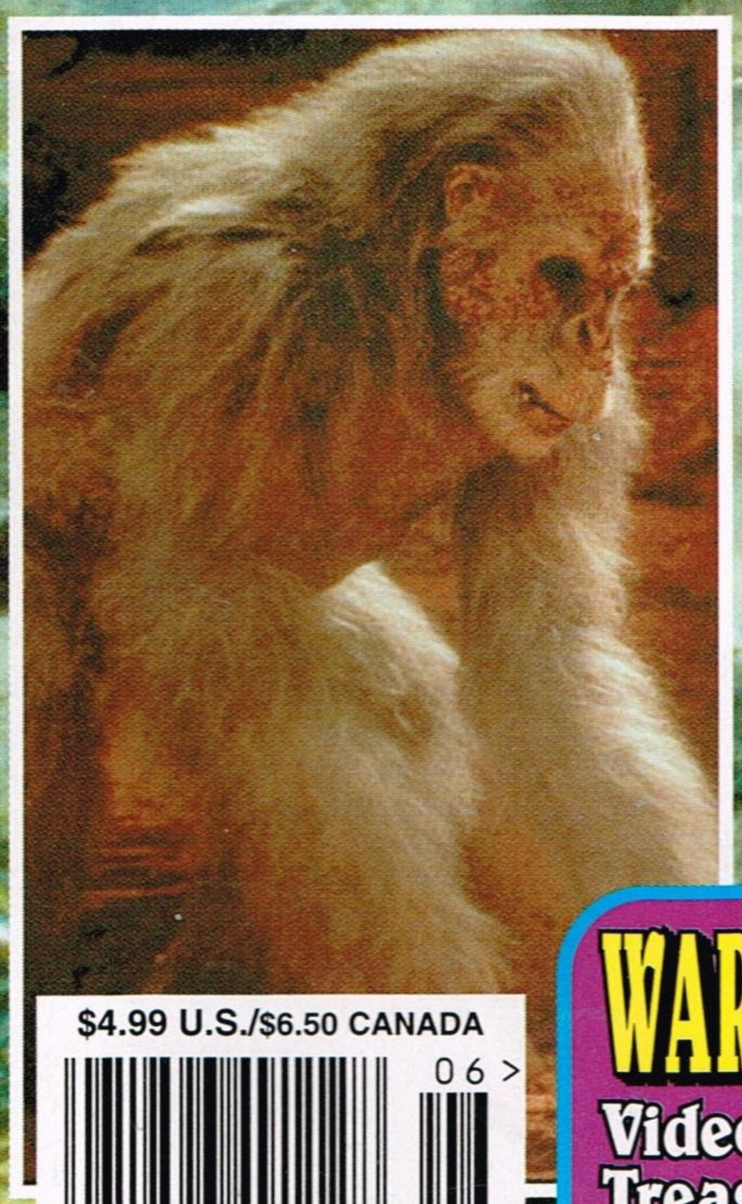

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BATMAN'S BATMAN

By BILL WARREN

As butler & confidant, genre veteran Michael Gough once again serves the Dark Knight.

You probably know the face: long, rectangular, a wide forehead, a wide mouth, with narrow eyes that can range from icy cold to meltingly warm. A very British face. And you probably know the voice, too: trained, cultured, deceptively gentle. Michael Gough has been making movies since the late 1940s; he's usually in character roles, often as sadistic villains.

From the late '50s through the early '70s, he was one of the most frequent horror movie stars in England, third in popularity and importance only to Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing—both of whom he appeared with from time to time. Gough tends to dismiss his horror roles and to not always remember much about them, but he's aware that they're what led to his recurring part in one of the biggest, most expensive series of movies ever made.

He's Alfred Pennyworth in the *Batman* movies, returning to the role again in *Batman Forever*, butler to a new Bruce Wayne/Batman, Val Kilmer. Amusingly enough, he based Batman's butler in part on—a batman. "A guy I knew," Gough says, "had been a batman—a servant in the British army—to a major-general or someone like that. After the major general retired, the batman retired too, and after the major-general died, the batman stayed on, looking after the wife and taking care of them all.

"He even went to a cookery school for young ladies, and there was this seasoned old soldier, with an apron on, learning to cook with a whole lot of debutante ladies; rich parents send their daughters to learn how to cook. And here's this old character, doing it all. His entire life was wound up with this family."

Just as, of course, Alfred's life is wound up with Bruce Wayne. In the first *Batman*, one of the most pleasant scenes featured him sitting in the kitchen, warmly reminiscing about young Master Bruce with Vicki Vale (Kim Basinger). Reminded of this scene,

Design & Layout: Jim McLernon

All Batman Forever Photos: Ralph Nelson/Copyright 1995 DC Comics Inc.

All Batman Photos: Copyright 1989 DC Comics Inc.

According to Gough, "Val [Kilmer] and Michael [Keaton] are very different, but the relationship we have is the same: Alfred and Bruce are very good friends."

Gough is very curious to know how it played with audiences, and is happy to learn that it's so well-liked.

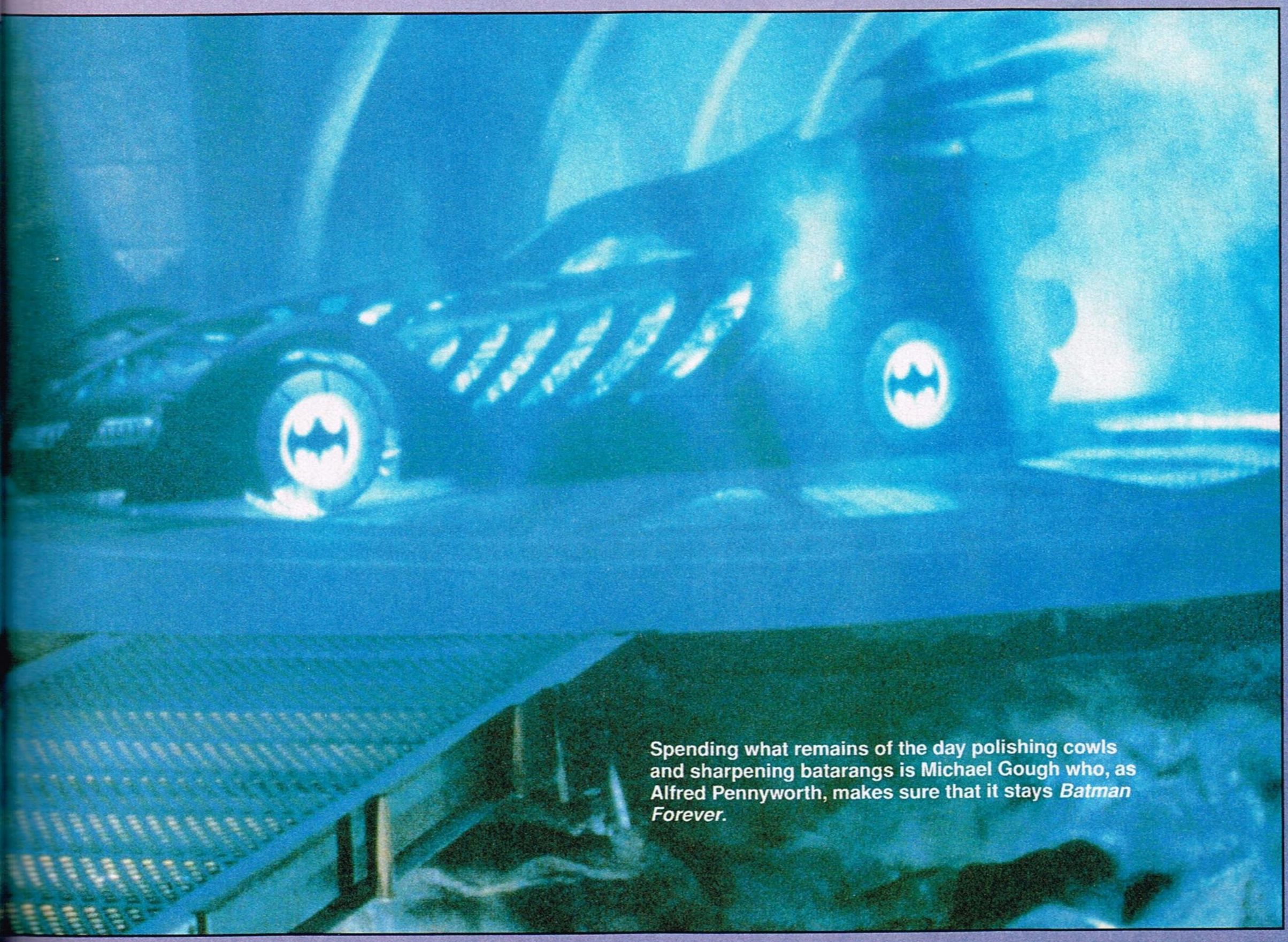
"I think Batman *needs* Alfred," Gough speculates, "because he's sort of the White Cliffs of Dover. There would be nothing to return to England for if the White Cliffs of Dover weren't there. Alfred is *home* for Batman; Alfred is there. He shines the shoes, he does the cooking—he does everything in the whole house, as far as I can make out. He's essential."

Clearly that's the case so far. Alfred is reliable, the perfect butler to both Bruce Wayne and Batman, deferential but caring to both sides of his master's dual identity. But there's more, of course. "Alfred needs Batman," Gough claims, "because he's family. Alfred's entire life is wound up with Bruce Wayne, just as that of the batman I mentioned was wound up with the family of his major-general. Alfred is the only family Bruce Wayne has now, and Bruce is the only family Alfred has. Bruce's mother and father are dead—Alfred is it. They are very, very close in a way, but still very much master and servant. I'm careful to always remember that, and I don't overstep the mark."

Bright Knight

There are new elements, of course, in *Batman Forever*. Joel Schumacher has taken over as director from Tim Burton, and Val Kilmer has donned the cape and cowl instead of Michael Keaton. And now there's also Robin/Dick Grayson, in the person of Chris O'Donnell, to contend with. "The interesting thing," Gough points out, "is that with Chris O'Donnell I play the scenes we didn't see in the first two. I brought up Batman when he was a lad, you see, and now I'm working with Dick Grayson when *he's* a lad. I'm really filling in the scenes that I didn't play with Michael Keaton in the first two films." In other words, moviegoers get to see, at least briefly, how Alfred brings up a young man.

Kilmer and Keaton are "very different indeed. I had worked with Val before, in *Top Secret*. It was like old friends meeting up, so that was good. On the first film, I got to know Michael before we started work; I



Spending what remains of the day polishing cowls and sharpening batarangs is Michael Gough who, as Alfred Pennyworth, makes sure that it stays *Batman Forever.*

All Batman Film Photos: Courtesy Warner Bros.

used to go down and meet with him at the studio, and we met at his hotel, so by the time we started shooting, we knew each other. We got on very well. Val and Michael are very different, but the relationship we have is the same: Alfred and Bruce are very good friends."

However, the relationship he has as Alfred to Bruce Wayne remains the same whether Bruce's wearing the expensive Italian suits or the Dark Knight garb. "When I'm talking to Bruce Wayne," Gough says, "I don't think, 'Oh my word, you are different,' or, for that matter, 'You are the same.' Bruce Wayne is not an actor, after all; he is Alfred's employer."

Similarly, Gough finds a bit of difficulty comparing Schumacher to Burton as a director. He is quite enthusiastic about Schumacher. "He's wonderful, and it's so nice to be able to say it and really mean it. He's very, very good. He's my friend; he's a friend of everybody on the set. He's very amusing, very funny, and still very serious about the work. He's just the sort of director every actor dreams of."

Asked to compare the two, Gough begs off, on the apparent assumption that he's being asked to rate the directorial abilities of the two men. He does admit, however, that they're totally different. "I think Burton is more serious, but he gets very excited about the whole thing, about the work he's doing. He has been down to the set of this film; he's lovely, and we all get on very well together."

Gough feels that the tone of this adventure is probably going to be lighter than the last two, "Though of course, I haven't seen it yet." Alfred still doesn't have any scenes with the villains, exactly; "I get thumped on my head by the villains, that's all." However, there are more scenes overall with Alfred than in the first two pictures, he feels. "It's a rounder part than it was before, but he's still Alfred," Gough laughs.

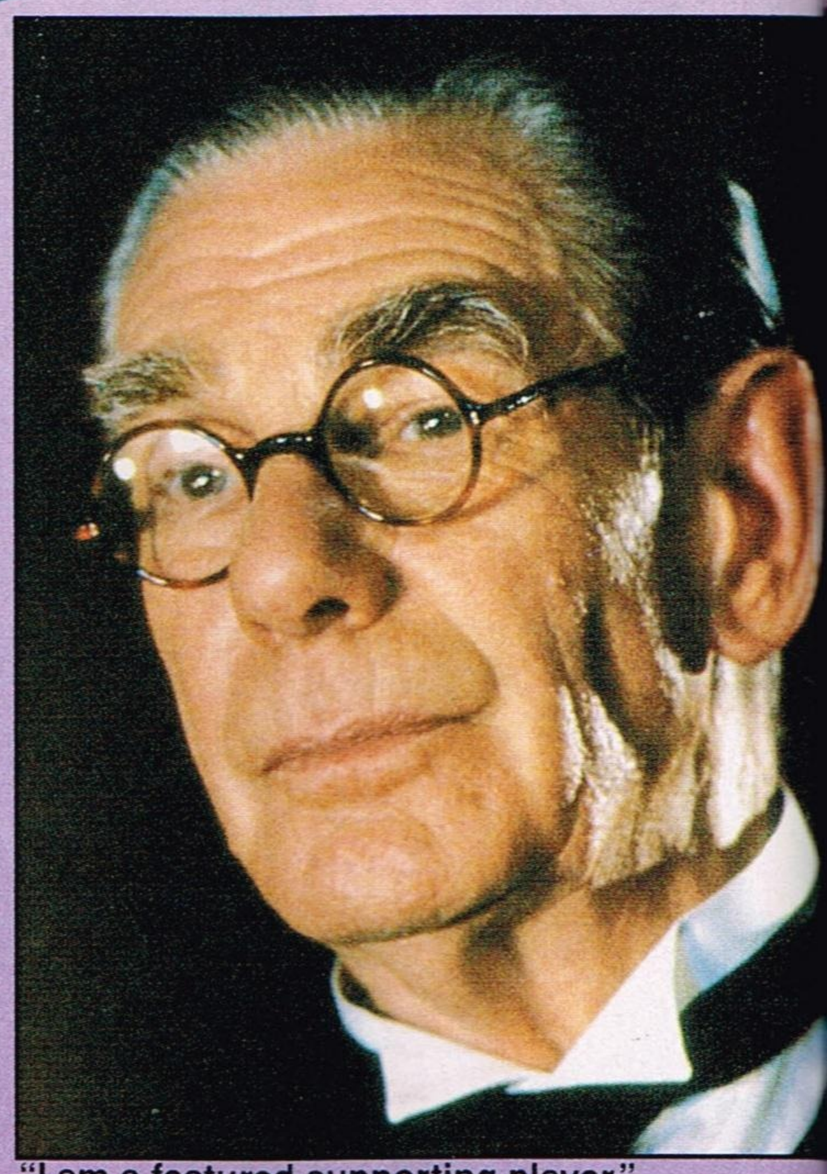
> "I've got an intelligent face, and nothing between the ears at all."

With each successive Bat-movie, fans not only see more of Wayne Manor, but areas previously unseen, and that trend continues in *Batman Forever*. "The sets have been different each time," Gough points out, "and they are different again. They keep a Gothic kind of look to it. I think you do see more of the interior of Wayne Manor, bedrooms, sitting rooms, stairs."

Gough wasn't exactly the expected casting choice for the role of Alfred; his selection surprised moviegoers the world over, even those who have always liked him as an actor. It even surprised Gough. "Nobody else would have thought of it except Tim Burton," he surmises, "and Tim thought of it because he had seen me in the horror films."

And what does he think of playing this role? "I love it. I think Alfred is a very good man, a very caring guy, the sort of person who's very close to my heart in a way. He has a lovely sense of humor, in a quiet way. I think there's something of the nanny in me, and this brought it out. I've had a lot of children, a lot of grandchildren and in a way, it's an extension of all that," he concludes.

Despite the worldwide popularity of the *Batman* movies, Gough is rarely recognized as Alfred. "I'm recognized for other things, like the episode of *Inspector Morse* that was shown the other day; many people gave me a hello and all that, but they don't recognize me as Batman's batman. I'm pleased to say that they don't."



"I am a featured supporting player," Gough explains, "and that's just what I'm happy being."

Great Pretender

Gough is, like most actors, a shy man at heart, so public recognition embarrasses him. But like most actors too, he remembers the more baroque instances of recognition. "I was on top of a bus in London when I got a tap on the shoulder. The guy said to me, 'It is, isn't it?' I said, 'What are you talking about?' He said, 'Well you are, aren't you?' I suddenly realized what he was on about. I said, 'Yes, that's it.' He turned around and shouted to someone in the back of the bus. 'Yes, it is, it is him.' He turned back to me. 'What's your name?' I said, 'Peter Cushing.' He shouts, 'I told you, it's Pete, old Pete Cushing.' I scampered down the stairs and was off the bus with great speed."

BILL WARREN, veteran STARLOG correspondent, is the author of Keep Watching the Skies *Volumes 1 & 2 ($45, $49.95). He previewed* Species *in issue #214.*

He admits his unusual last name, which really rhymes with "off," may have given some people pause before they approached him. And he's heard all the variations. "I've heard Michael Goo, Michael Gow, and so on, but the best one was 'Michael Gup.' I assume that was because the word spelled 'hiccough' is pronounced 'hiccup.' So someone called me 'Mike Gup.' "

Over the years, Michael Gow Goo Gup Gough has worked steadily, more so than those on the western side of the Atlantic might realize, because he's as busy on stage and television as in films. He even appeared, many years apart, in two sets of episodes of *Doctor Who*. He found the first, "The Celestial Toymaker," to be "very hard work, very difficult indeed. I had to remember all these numbers. I played someone called the Celestial Toymaker, and had to remember all these ridiculous numbers! I was doing a play at the time, so that made it harder to learn the lines—it was torture. I couldn't look at the show myself, you see, but someone saw it. I told them how much pain it was, and they said, 'It didn't show. You looked absolutely confident. You come out with all the numbers.' " Gough sighs. "Someone will write them down someday, and find out I was all wrong."

Dracula Photo: Copyright 1958 Hammer Films

Gough has fond memories of his *Horror of Dracula* co-star, the late Peter Cushing. "You never will hear an unkind word about him."

He actually doesn't remember the later *Doctor Who* he appeared in anywhere near as well. "I just cannot remember. Someone sent me a list of my films, and asked me to add the ones not on the list. There were more than 80 films. And that was three years ago, and I've done quite a number since then. And there has been a lot of theater and television. I've got a very simple brain; I've got an intelligent face, and nothing between the ears at all." Perhaps that's why the scientists Gough has played have tended to be mad.

His initial desire to be an actor, he says, came from two drives. "I fancied actresses, and I never passed a single exam in my life, so I thought I would never earn a living. What was I going to do? But you buy a stick of number nine and a stick of number five makeup, and there, you are an actor. To tell the truth though, I do remember. I saw a play—I think it was called *Sailors Don't Care*, a wonderful light comedy—and it starred Rex Harrison. I thought that's what I wanted to be, that guy! Years later, Rex became a great mate. I told him this, and he said, 'That's ridiculous! We're of an age!' I said, 'No, we're not. You were a grown-up actor, and I was still in school. We can't be of an age.' 'Bloody lies!' he said." (Harrison was born in 1908, Gough in 1917.)

His desire to be an actor led to an unusual institution for it: Wye Agricultural College. "I was trying to get work in the theater, and I couldn't get any work. I worked in shops and things like that, and the only time I had off was at lunchtime, so of course when I went to see agents at that time, they were out to lunch. So, I had my sandwich in the agent's outer office.

All Batman Returns Photos: Copyright 1992 DC Comics Inc.

"I think [Tim] Burton is more serious," says Gough, comparing Burton (on desk) to Joel Schumacher. "But he gets very excited about the whole thing."

"A friend who knew about rubber plantations said I should go to an agricultural college, then I could go out and rubber-plant. I thought it would be nice to go to an agricultural college and get some fresh air, so I went to Wye Agricultural College for a year."

Fortunately for Gough, the great actress Edith Evans was a friend of his mother's. "She had a house near the college, quite near, so I used to hitch hike over and meet her—and that's where I first met Alec Guinness."

Later on, they became good friends. "I was a student at the Old Vic school, and Alec was a small-part actor. He used to call me McGough, and I called him McGuinness; when he was knighted, he became McSir." Gough is somewhat envious of Guinness' ability to almost completely vanish when he's offstage. "When we were doing *The Horse's Mouth*, which Alec wrote but Ronald Neame directed, we were on location down at the docks. Children came out of school and got everybody's autograph—the lights, the stagehands, everybody's—except Alec Guinness, who was sitting there on a crate watching the autographs being collected. He was amused."

Character Guy

Even while appearing in mainstream movies like *The Go-Between*, *The Dresser* and *Out of Africa*, Gough has been busy in the field of horror and SF movies. He was Arthur Holmwood in the classic *Horror of Dracula* in 1958, and went on to appear in many others: *Horrors of the Black Museum*, *Konga*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *No Place Like Homicide*, *Black Zoo*—his favorite, because he got to work with a lot of animals—*Dr. Terror's House of Horrors*, *The Skull*, *They Came From Beyond Space*, *Berserk!*, *The Crimson Cult*, *Trog*, *Crucible of Horror*, *Horror Hospital*, *The Boys from Brazil*, *The Legend of Hell House* (in an unbilled cameo) and *Satan's Slave*, his last low-budget horror movie to date, released in 1977.

In most of these, he was the leading villain, often giving very colorful, broad performances, resulting in his sometimes being referred to as "the British Vincent Price"—which may be why Price fan Tim Burton cast Gough as Alfred in the first place. Gough says, "I don't know if I was the British Vincent Price, but the roles were larger than life. In a funny way, when you're really doing rubbish—I don't mean rubbish, but things that are hard to believe—you have to work hard to make people believe it. There's a sort of trick to it."

His work in these films brought him into contact with Cushing and Christopher Lee, of course. Lee, Gough says, "is incredible. I seem to remember if you were talking about Italy, he would say, 'Yes, when I was singing in Milan...' or 'When I was a policeman in Africa...' And he has *really* done all these

(continued on page 72)